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CITIES AND SCHOOLS.

BY- CLEMENTS, H. MILLARD

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THIS DISCUSSION OF URBAN EDUCATION BRIEFLY ANALYZES THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF LARGE CITIES AND SCHOOLS. IT IS FELT THAT THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, WHICH PROVIDES ONLY ONE FORM OF EDUCATION FOR ALL PUPILS, INCONGRUOUSLY REFLECTS THE ADHERENCE TO ESTABLISHED VALUES, LIMITED OPPORTUNITY FOR CHOICE, AND GENERAL ROUTINIZATION WHICH ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF SMALL TOWN SCHOOLS. IF URBAN SCHOOLS ARE TO BE MEANINGFUL, THEY MUST PRESERVE THE BASIC FREEDOMS AND AMENITIES OF CITY LIFE. EDUCATORS IN LARGE CITIES SHOULD ENCOURAGE EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY AND INDEPENDENT THINKING, AND BE WILLING TO TAKE RISKS. CURRICULUM MATERIAL SHOULD BE AUTHENTIC AND ACCURATE. OTHER INNOVATIONS MIGHT INCLUDE THE DECENTRALIZATION OF CITY SCHOOLS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL PARKS WHICH WOULD OFFER A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 49, NUMBER 2, OCTOBER 1967. (NH)

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Cities and Schools

By H. MILLARD CLEMENTS

Mr. Clements believes that the assumptions from which we start thinking about improvement of big-city education are unsound. Our only hope is to abandon our rural myths and seek to preserve the amazing diversity and the modern amenities that make cities dangerous and attractive.

BOTH plans for schools and plans for cities have in the past been plagued with a pleasant rhetoric that has frequently led to unhappy results: Huge portions of our school population escape as soon as they are legally able; predominantly Negro schools in our major cities are in a constant state of chaos; delinquency rates often rise when people are moved into supposedly improved housing that urban renewal provides.

When we think about our cities, we are moved by nostalgia for the presumed virtues of small-town life; when we think about schools we are moved by our good intentions to believe that simple remedies will alleviate the catastrophe of many of our city schools.

New housing or new school buildings, new parks or new school materials, are not likely to resolve our urban problems. Planning for cities and planning for schools is much more complicated, and it is this complexity that is responsible for the dilemmas that both cities and schools face. Jane Jacobs' advice is worth considering as we encounter urban dilemmas:

> It is fashionable to suppose that certain touchstones of the good life will create good neighborhoods—schools, parks, clean housing, and the like, . . . How easy life would be if this were so! How charming to control complicated ornery society by bestowing upon it simple physical goodies. In real life cause and effect are not so simple.[1]

Simple physical goodies in the form of new buildings either garish or beautiful, new textbooks for children either debauched or intelligent, spacious malls either used or deserted, will not of themselves remedy the problems of either cities or schools—although a well-written book about cities will always be welcome. A new film, if it is authentic in its treatment of ideas, people, and things would be a pleasure to have available. And without heroism, we cannot expect or perhaps even deserve an interesting environment in which to live.

We should begin with an appreciation of our ignorance. Knowing what we do not know may tempt us to think about the world at hand. If we can pay attention to the sounds and sights of our cities and our schools, we may develop fresh conceptions rather than retell old myths:

> There is a poignancy in all things clear,
> In the stare of the deer, in the ring of a hammer in the morning,
> Seeing a bucket of perfectly lucid water
> We fall to imagining prodigious honesties.[2]

And that is perhaps what we should seek to do: Imagine new honesties. How can schools be made useful for all of the children who are compelled by law to attend? If the answer is not a new building, a new curriculum, or instructional heroism, what are more reasonable answers and how may we seek them?

How can schools be made more useful? What are thinkable possibilities? My proposal is to pose and answer some other questions first:

1. How do cities work?
2. How do schools work?

If answers to these questions are forthcoming, then it may become reasonable to suggest some possibilities for schools that might tend to make them more useful.

How Do Cities Work?

The form of this question calls attention to the presupposition that a city should be thought of as a process and any plans for preserving city amenities should be founded on an awareness of the workings of that process. Until we develop some reasonable theories of city life, there is little hope that we will do more than replace one ugliness for another.

The literature that deals with problems of cities usually does not report efforts of men to understand the workings of cities. It reports the moral dismay some men feel at the ugliness of some aspect of city life.

Two solutions to the ugliness of cities may easily be found in the literature. One solution is to seek to impose upon a city the organization and community that nostalgically was thought to have been the beauty of small town life; the other solution is to ignore people entirely and make cities into communities of buildings that may form interesting geometric designs but few human possibilities.

Many city planners have no ade-

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quate theory of how cities work, and thus they only moralize, and moralizing about delinquency and ugliness has led us to greater and more monumental travesties of planning:

1. There is the tendency to ignore existing people and cities and to devise plans, arrangements, and buildings for imaginary peoples, needs, interests, and styles of living.

2. There is the tendency to project upon real cities conceptions that are sometimes monumental and sometimes rural but in any case usually destructive of the vitality and amenity of city life.

A city, like a single human being, is an event and not a work of art. A formal demand upon all who think about cities and schools should be to think of them as processes that we must seek to understand. In this effort Jane Jacobs may be our most useful ally.

How Do Schools Work?

There is more to be said about cities, but let us think about schooling in the United States today:

1. All children must attend: We have compulsory education.

2. There is an established curriculum that is approximately the same for all of the communities in our nation. Although some schools are new and some are old, although some are run like security institutions and some like social clubs, the academic or scholarly tasks that children are called upon to do in the various schools are often only marginally different.

3. Students spend a great deal of time reading books that are intellectually sterile or misleading, often both, with regard to fact and interpretation.

4. There is an established school building and classroom. Classrooms are of approximately equal size. Each room is usually filled with desks, and students spend about two-thirds of their school day sitting in those desks listening to teachers or other students talk.

5. Teachers, typically, have low pay, low status, and little encouragement to take responsibility for the curriculum with which they work.

Our schools seem to provide a compulsory experience of social and intellectual routinization. Children appear to be encouraged to engage without complaint in tedious tasks, to accept passively arbitrary adult authority, to be punctual and to seek their satisfactions in sports, school politics, and sociability. Some young people appear to benefit from this experience, some people seem to be unharmed by it, and some seem to be destroyed by it. Our monolithic, routinized effort to provide one and only one form of schooling for all of the children of our nation is a social disaster for some children, and useless to many others.

Cities and Schools

How do cities work? Some tentative answers to this question can be suggested here. Life in a city contrasts to life outside of a city. It is this contrast that illuminates both the dilemmas of cities and the dilemmas of schools:

City Life

1. There is separation of work and residence.

2. There is mobility, both social mobility and physical movement.

3. Work makes a limited claim on the life of an individual. Although a man and his wife may spend hours at work, the being of neither is determined by their work.

4. People change jobs and professions; city people do not follow the occupation of their parents. A job helps a person make money; his work may be an after-hours affair.

5. Anonymity makes possible the freedom of moral choice.

6. Values are relativized; cities are pluralistic.

7. Cities offer the danger and the freedom of choice in many contests

"The mood of the city is ironical; the mood of the town is naïve."

Town Life

1. There is much less separation of work and residence.

2. There is little or less mobility: Social conditions are much more stable, and there is much less physical travel.

3. Work makes a substantial claim on the life of an individual; to some extent a man *is* what he *does* in a small town.

4. Children often follow the occupations of their fathers. People change jobs infrequently. There is close identity between a man and what he produces for a market.

5. Community imposes the demand to follow the "law" or face peril.

6. Values tend to be established; all must at least appear to conform.

7. Small towns offer the comfort and security of established values and limited opportunity for choice.

The intellectual style is ironical; the intellectual, wherever he lives, is an urban product; the non-intellectual has the small town security of an established moral and intellectual order. The mood of the city is ironical; the mood of the town is naïve. It is the conflict between naïveté and irony, between security and freedom, that troubles both cities and schools.

Anonymity may lead to despair as well as to freedom; mobility may lead to crime as well as to opportunity; the relativization of values may lead to ugliness as well as to beauty.

Plans for schools and plans for cities reflect this dual possibility. Our established system of schooling that is the same everywhere for everybody is a small-town invention. Its approach to books and work is uncritical, self-assured, naïve, pretentious, anti-intellectual but practical. There is little or no pluralism in school opportunities. Dropouts, boredom, and violence are natural developments in a system of schools in an urban environment. The city school is the paradigmatic example of small-town values in the midst of an urban environment. Until we alter the

institution of city schooling I can see little hope of having our schools being useful to all children or of avoiding conflict: Our city schools are not an urban amenity.

The conflict between cities and towns also illuminates the problem of city planning. Much of the search for ways to avoid ugliness has been attempts to deny freedom. Efforts have been made to reestablish town values in urban settings. Suburbs, perhaps, are the most obvious and garish examples of the flight from freedom and danger in city living. The essential problems of city living are safety and ugliness; whatever solutions are proposed, if they do not preserve the basic freedoms, the basic amenities

"Our established system of schooling that is the same everywhere for everybody is a small-town invention."

of city life, will not be viable in an urban community.

What are the amenities of city life? They are not products but processes, not buildings but milieu, not naïveté but irony. The amenities of city life are such things as these:

1. The possibility for anonymity and selective self-disclosure.
2. Mobility for play, work, and adventure.
3. Specialty facilities that permit a plurality of tastes, interests, and pursuits.
4. Functional relationships rather than propinquity relationships.
5. The opportunity and the danger of choice.

Plans for cities that do not preserve these amenities will most likely lead to ugliness and violence in our cities.

Our schools are a primary city institution that violates almost every one of these amenities of city life, and thus predictably encounters the problems and ugliness that come with the denial of city freedoms and the imposition of the securities of town values.

It seems to me that in a general way schools that reflect the amenities of city life should have such virtues as these:

1. Function rather than propinquity should determine school attendance. This suggests that school parks might provide four or five different kinds of school opportunities from among which any student might choose. A school park like a city park might be an exciting place in which to spend time or a dangerous place of violence. The difference between safety and violence must be disclosed in the processes of living. The notion of school must be made as diverse as the imagination makes possible, and the results of success and failure clearly faced.

2. Schooling should be decentralized. Each school staff should have responsibility for the quality and character of its program. A school should only function if it can attract and hold a student body. The city is the milieu of choice, and choice in schooling should be a city possibility. City educators must abandon the search for the one curriculum that will serve everyone who comes to school and encourage educational diversity so that what is success and failure in education can be disclosed.

3. Life in any school should reflect urban values for both students and educators. Both should have freedom. Neither should be routinized to passivity, to sentimental ideas, to self-destructive roles in schools.

4. Material in use in school should be authentic, accurate, and reflect the irony that all knowledge of the human situation entails: Knowledge is man-made. We should always remember the human source of ideas.

Educators work in an established, apparently successful, routine. They attend meetings that usually do not deal with substantive matters of instruction. The general functions of the school are often presumed to be self-evidently appropriate. Only the children, the parents, or the community are to blame for whatever failure children experience in school. The easiest role for teachers to follow is simply to do as others do; to come to believe as others believe; to abandon an effort personally to determine what would be of service to students, to assess the justice of the treatment of ideas and issues, and to provide a vital school experience. The customs of any particular school may or may not be of service to students, deal justly with children and ideas, provide a vital program. The obligation of a professional teacher is to work with students; to work on various school committees and through faculty meetings to live up to these demands of the profession; to act in a competent, professional way and establish routines and procedures that enhance the growth of the profession.

The following are some specific alternatives that educators might pursue:[3]

1. Be willing to face risks: Dare to be of service to your students even if it calls upon you to question school and school district policy.
2. Deal competently with whatever incompetent materials are used in the school. Engage students in revisions of inadequate treatments of history in social studies textbooks. Bring to the attention of students the findings of recent scholarship in language, science, and contemporary problems.
3. Call upon the school and the school district to develop curriculum materials that will be reasonably accurate, reasonably up to date, and reasonably useful for study. Call upon the school district to diversify the forms of schooling that are to be made available to students.
4. Do not teach children things that are not true about their native language. In spite of the competent efforts of the National Council of Teachers of English, our children learn a great deal about our language that is simply not true.
5. Do not teach children things that are not true about the history of their country or of world affairs generally.[4]
6. Don't be a bore. Guarantee

to your students that each test that you write, each task or assignment that you propose, deals authentically with ideas and makes sense to students. Teaching should be a dramatic opportunity for thought and not a pleasant entertainment. It should be the encouragement of diversity and not the establishment of routine.

7. Acknowledge that an educator can fail students, but students can't fail education. The purpose of public education is to provide a useful service to students. Although a professional staff may be incompetent and implement a program of schooling that is demonstratably ineffective, children can only be as they are. It is the obligation of

professional educators to search for viable approaches to schooling for all of the various children that are compelled by law to attend school. School and school personnel can fail, can engage in malpractice, but children can only come to school with whatever problems and liabilities they may possess. It is the challenge of education to provide them with a relevant, useful, human form of schooling.

The problem of planning for schools and cities is complex; our only hope is to abandon our rural myths and seek to preserve in the city and in the city schools the amenities that make life in cities a danger and an attraction. Exhortation is futile. In the search for some understanding of process there is both hope and adventure. In the quest for diversity in schools there lies the possibility of dramatic illustration of urban amenity.

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[1]Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* New York: Vintage Books, 1963. pp. 112-113.

[2]Wilbur, Richard. *Ceremony and Other Poems.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948. "Clearness," p. 33.

[3]H. Millard Clements and James B. McDonald. *Moral Dilemmas of Schooling.* Columbus, O.: Charles E. Merrill. In press.

[4]H. Millard Clements, B. R. Tabachnick, and Wm. R. Fielder. *Social Study: Inquiry in Elementary Classrooms.* Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966.

► "We will never have first-rate city schools unless we have first-rate cities," U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II told 400 city and school officials at a West Coast meeting in August.

Howe was the keynote speaker at a conference on urban school planning sponsored by the Stanford School Planning Laboratory and Educational Facilities Laboratories of New York.

"It's time educators realize that cities are their business," Commissioner Howe said . . . "Educators must start paying attention to some matters we have neglected in the past: to tax policy, to site selection, to the multiple use of land and buildings.

"We should now and then forget about computer-assisted instruction, team teaching, and ungraded classes and dream a little bit, not about what kind of city school we want, but about what kind of city we want."

He envisioned for the educators and planners a derivation of the educational park—"a living park: a building that would integrate retail stores, banks, a medical center, restaurants, offices, and apartments, a building that would not only house and employ people but would at the same time educate their youngsters from pre-school through high school.

"Think what a natural dent we could make in big-city segregation—racial, social, and economic—if instead of having a bus driver bring 50 children to school, their own fathers and working mothers brought them to the office," he told the group. "The children of bankers, dentists, secretaries, butchers, elevator operators—black and white, rich and poor, blue-collar and white-collar, all going to school in the same place."

"Schooling," Howe said, "which results in not learning to read, in not mastering a saleable skill, and in not mastering the habits which will lead to job success, is certainly one of the causes of dropouts and riots.

"I suspect that much of this violence really amounts to a ghetto version of a PTA meeting. Poorly educated parents and poorly educated teen-agers who do not know how to reach a city hierarchy separated from them by a host of cultural differences seize the only means of communication readily available to them.

"Riots are an expensive way to talk, but white people are finally listening after decades of ignoring the quieter voices from the ghetto."

Closing the gap between city schools and the children they serve, Howe warned, will call for vast expenditures of energy, imagination, and money.

"Urban education," he said, "is more expensive than suburban or rural for a number of reasons: land and construction costs are greater; salaries must be higher to attract teachers into the cities"; and the education of culturally deprived children requires the school "to perform much of the instructional work that normally takes place—or should take place—in the home."

In order to place the burden of this task on the cities, where it belongs, rather than on "desperate experiments financed by foundations and federal programs," Howe said, "we must restore to the cities the financial and political power to solve the problems thrust upon them. And we must restore the city neighborhood."

Cities have sapped their own political power by driving away middle-income families and eroded their financial power by "poor land use, unplanned development, and subsidized ugliness," he said.

"More and more, the only people who can afford city living are the rich, the poor, and the childless," the Commissioner said.

By making better use of their central core land—other than devoting it to parking lots and slum buildings—"the cities themselves could do a major share of the job if they harness the profit motive to their own goals and matched it with the significant support available from federal sources."

Cities will have to go to their state legislatures to alter the tax structure which now assesses on the basis of the value of the building to the owner, not to the city, Howe suggested.

Ignoring the "site-value" of the land "confuses property taxes with income taxes," he said.

Schools which would benefit from an enlightened tax policy, Howe declared, could afford to surround their buildings with recreation space and become cultural and educational centers open day and night.

"[Schools] would exist in the midst of the business and cultural life of the city; while training people to serve the one, [they] would enrich the lives of its students with the other," he said.

Educators must join forces with all the other people that make a city go, the Commissioner said, to form "a new integration of specialties to prevent the disintegration that threatens both cities and schools today."